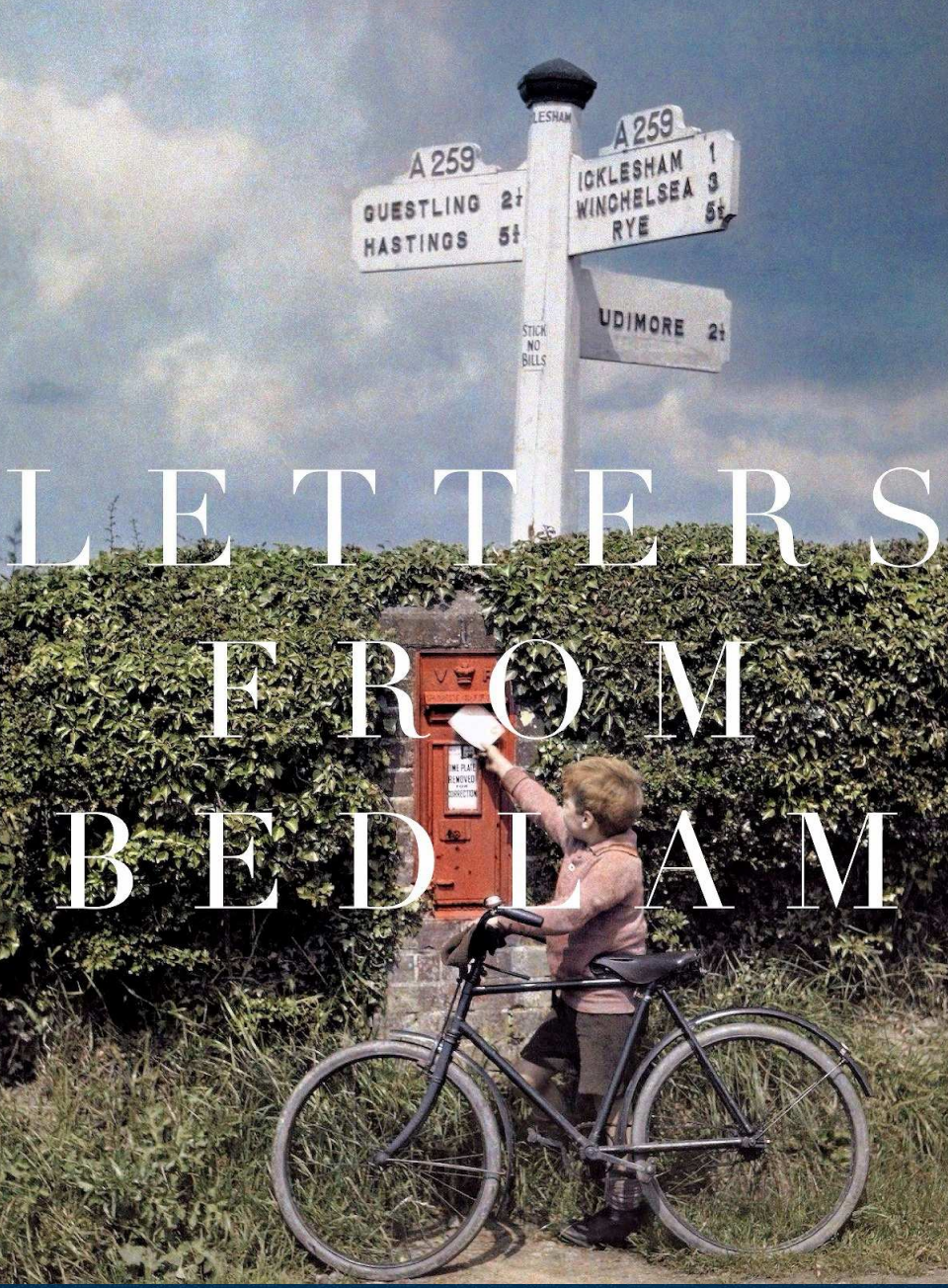


LETTERS FROM BEDLAM

Poems

KELLY JAMES CARROLL

LETTERS FROM BEDLAM

For that tree

That fell in that forest

When no one was around to listen

From which these pages

Were raucously milled

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Letters from Bedlam

Selected Poems

Kelly James Carroll

What in me is dark
Illumine

— Paradise Lost, Book I

CONTENTS

Good Reader xv

I.

The Dog of Intelligence 2
The Thief of Paris 6
Yoga 10
A Hamster Wheel 14
Portmanteau 19
Note to Self 24
Motorbike to Mỹ Sơn 26
Allusions 29
The Pagoda 32
Your Beloved Protagonists 36

II.

Edditors 42

Donating Blood 46
The Forecast 49
Love 52
Dust to Dust 57
Somewhere Over the Atlantic 62
A Fly on the Wall 64
The Invention of the Umbrella 68
Gumshoe 71
Peeing in the Deep End of a Crowded Pool in Early June 73

III.

On Constructing Holes 77
The Great Onomatopoeia Inquisition 79
Why Some Poets Die Alone 81
Petrichor 82
OCD 86
Why Did She Have to Skin Her Knee? 90
Youth 92

Thunderstorm Approaches Venice 95
Over the Dark Meadow 97
Sleeping in the Pews – Christmas Eve, 2009 98

IV.

The Record of the Pistol 102
Landscape Painters Across the Pond 106
The Committed 111
Concerning the Garrulous Philosopher Who Thought it Wildly Profound That the Greeks Had at Least Four Concepts for Love 115
The Sneakers 120
Writing a Nonet 124
Analogy 125
The Ghost of Solipsism 128
The Non-Perennial Human 132
Death of the Author 135

Glossary 144

Acknowledgments 153

Good Reader

I have something very important
to tell you
and all I ask
is for your eyes

Not to wander off
into the white margins of the page

Where your churning mind
might be beguiled
into pulling from the blankness
your preoccupations, perhaps
your unwashed dishes, your unmade bed

No, this is no to-do list
My dear fellow, this is — *poetry*.

And that song, *that song*,
that has been swimming laps
in your subconscious
ever since breakfast

That euphonious earworm
with the wonderfully clever chorus
the resonating crescendo
the reverberating ebbs of love
Tunneling through the apple of the day

Well, it has to go.
Let it fade away

Into the dissonance
Of these sun-shimmering leaves
and their mad rustling
As we walk an apple orchard together

Remove the gum
from your mouth, please —

It does not taste of spearmint
Here, you'll need a clean palate
to detect the subtle spices
on the wind.

And do not be too taken
with the warm light
spilling over the clouds
and washing onto your page.

For we will have to brave
the silent dark
before we can
share new light.

But even if we can't
break through the shackling
gravity of our own worlds
and drift freely out of orbit
unfettered into interplanetary space

Even if inertia takes a hold of us there,
becoming our new master

Even if we can never
Touch, and we are each
Bound to ourselves
— Forevermore.

What I wanted to tell you
is that I very much
would've liked to have known you
And for you to have known me.

Even as your hand loosens
followed by the soft thwacking
of these pages on the floor

and the silent movie projector
begins to flicker
on the backsides
of your closing eyelids

I hope I may be cast
as a character in your own
black and white film

Or at least
The ~~once~~ red balloon
Ascending off-screen

I.

The Dog of Intelligence

You might rashly assume
is a best friend to man

But that is only because
you have not yet seen the shreds and ribbons
that were once my house slippers of Religion
The pair with the really comfy supports

The soiled barcalounger of Trust
The slobbery crumbs
that once were the cookies I left Santa
Even now in the corner
ruminating with unblinking eyes
gnashing through her pretty collar of Reason

And I'm not sure I have the heart to show you
what became of the flat, agreeable earth

We once had for a yard
and the now uprooted garden of Hope

How she pulls me through the park
expediting me along like the Iditarod
when all I'd like to do is dally awhile
And take in the magnolias in bloom

And what a great propensity she has
for chasing away any company
I might like to entertain
Always snarling misgivings at their ankles

And one can tell she was no stranger
to the rolled up newspaper of Despair

I've begun to think it's the only play
that the great brute knows anymore

And nighttime is a peace she rips long
barking mad a demand
that rattles my dreams
like the last coin in a tin box
a skyward wail that knows we are all alone—

But I must tell you that there are early mornings
when I am stirred from bed
by her prancing weight
and we end up walking further than we should
beyond fences, to places without leashes

And no matter how much distance
I put between myself
and the gnarled stick of Survival
she always finds a way to retrieve it
dropping it at my feet

She'll roll around on the ground
frolicking in the filth of others
running circles around me
never responding to her name—

And then maybe we'll find the time
After she's tired herself out

To sit in the new warmth of the day
and dream quietly of love

All the while
letting her lick from my ice cream cone
with a mouth, legend has it
is twenty percent cleaner than my own

The Thief of Paris

"There was one of those big noises you sometimes hear at the front. I died then. I felt my soul or something coming right out of my body, like you'd pull a silk handkerchief out of a pocket by one corner." — E. Hemingway

The prehistoric scream, like whetting steel
the low rumbling of the train
as it left the station
Something like a distant, building thunder

The squares of windows
pulsating light through the cabin
like looking through a spinning zoetrope
of people sitting on a train

As we snaked through the scaffolding
of the under-city
and out into the constant hum

of a bright morning
So many preoccupied passengers

Reading books, reading newspapers
reading the landscape
And as it turned out
One among them — reading me

The way you drew to me that two finger salute
Spang from your brow
Just before alighting, as the doors closed
down onto the platform at Caen

How was I not to love you
The sudden lightness in my pocket

In case you were wondering
What I was saying
through the double paned glass

That day as you made your exit
into the anonymity of the crowd
was that — 'I will remember your face'

But the truth is — I don't
Nothing but the color of those sympathetic eyes
so amber they could be melliferous

I later imagined you
Your head plugged with my earphones
Your nimble fingers sifting my playlists
Wrapping your mouth around the foreign
and pear-shaped words of Sam Cooke

As I crossed the lapping channel
the following dawn
Through the deepest fog I had ever seen
drinking my way through a music-less breakfast

I began foot-tapping out a new tune
on the iron drum of the cold ship
Something about the madness of love
The words now have slipped my mind like silk

My voice thin and quavering
in the endless white silence
How I would have been glad for your company

A soprano I'd wager, or those eyes
Probably a superb falsetto

Whose pockets were your sticky hands in then,
my friend
When I was out haunting the blankness
Frightening the seagulls
Drifting on past the veil of the living

Yoga

On your tummy, arching backwards
Arms folded behind
like the wings of a sparrow

I believe you could be rocked,
as a rocking horse is rocked.
— Or perhaps

You are diving through the sky
Yes, a skydiver.
plummeting from the Heavens

Ponytail ascending upwards
whipping like a crazed flame

And I am secretly peering
from o'er top this white goose down
— Cloud

A sudden zephyr sends me soaring
dispersing the nimbus into cottony wisps

And I am falling for you now,
My dooméd angel

In an acrobatic bravura
I bring myself careening
into your slipstream

We will be two souls
locked in tandem
spinning the double helix of love
— Earthbound

Fingertips reaching, I
can almost touch y—

You rise from the carpet,
Saunter over to the couch
to where I was almost napping

And say that you felt
Like a boat —
A boat —

Which makes much more sense now.
Treading the waves
on your buoyant belly

Feasibly a galley
or more likely
A grand schooner

Your many ballooning sails
Gorged with the wind

Carrying you towards
the distant horizon

On which,
I am now a swift
parachute-less plunge

A tall and silent
Fountain spurt
Upon the brim of your sea.

A Hamster Wheel

I've begun to notice
that in the mornings
when I'm filling the little water bottle
for my hamster, St. George

I'll have a quick cogitation
Practically subconscious
On how much exactly
I should supply

Not too much,
because for pets
too much of anything
always seems to be ill-advised

But just then I'll think about
what the new day might hold for me

An untimely death, perhaps.

The South Korean buses
that brake for no pedestrian
Practically corybantic in the morning rush
might finally get the best of me

And how long would it take
for some good citizen to step foot
into the apartment where a person
once lived, and God willing, a hamster still does.

St. George would only have
this day's ration of filtered water
To bide him— possibly weeks.

After this daily hesitation
I'll shut off the facet

And if one cared to look
Today's dénouement on mortality
would round off just below 18ml,
If one were to carefully observe the meniscus

This puts me at ease
Knowing that if today were to be my last
eventually one will open this door
step into a slightly stagnant apartment

They will see several neckties hanging,
neckties I have worn on Sunday mornings,
to school, to weddings, and funerals

There will be brown bananas
on the window sill
beside a wilted Japanese hydrangea

A smartly made bed,
a photographic montage
of an exhausted life on the refrigerator door
safeguarding curdled milk

And through this ghostly silence will creep
the rickety turning of a wheel
on which there will be
A waterlogged hamster

Fully hydrated
deliriously turning on
Lost in thought

Probably mulling over
whether he can do this forever

And if he starts to understand
that he cannot

I imagine a sudden need will wrest him
and he will most likely collapse
there on the tread of thought

Creating a wet clump of laundry
on the dryer wall scenario

Hopefully this is when the rescue will come
and he will be gently wrung dry
by the cradling hands of gods

Portmanteau

For all my numerous literary encounters
I have no idea what this word means

First it was a thingamabob
that often accompanied men on puffing trains
threading their way through
the changing landscapes of the 19th century

A shadowy, enigmatic word
haunting the heels of travelers
as they crossed railway platforms in India

Later it was a whatchamacallit
jostling on the haunches of camels
employed to clamber the many dunes
that come before an Egyptian treasure

It inevitably evolved into a dingus
that presaged a farewell

The characters standing silently in doorways
the pale glow of dawn slowly filling the room
revealing on the bed one of these
loaded harbingers of goodbye

And I knew that if I should ever board
a steamliner bound for a new world
I would likely be asked to provide
one of these doodads

My ticket, gabardine overcoat, and a
portmanteau

Counterpart to the parasol
confidant to the drifter
and ill omen to the small town lover

A whatnot that could produce
any number of unlikely curios into the story

A doohickey from which far off sundries
were pulled and laid
in the outstretched hands of boys
craving the affections of long absent fathers

And it was only this morning
when I saw one bucked from the backend
of a horse drawn carriage
Bumping down the many flagstones
of Victorian London

My hands first ran along
the sturdy sides of its meaning
Combing the edges
simultaneously coming to the latches
The brass fish-tails turning until — it clicked

And there it was exploding open
in quiet baggage cars, and populated coaches
Garments heaping onto dignified passengers
Trousers unfolding in the wind
as the definition unfolded in my mind

Rocketing fortune-hunters from their howdahs
expulsing its contents into the arid air
The lexical panties, the corsets of vocabulary
floating down to the shifting desert sands

And there they were, buoyantly strapped
under the makeshift rafts of castaways
plunging into the prison wall of the tide
And launching grifters
from their streetside podiums

And there it was at last
in the muffled square of Tsarist Russia

Under the bench
between the two momentary strangers
about to set off in opposite directions
Their cold hands touching
as they absently reached down for a handle

On the same overpacked eucatastrophe
covered in snow
that we can't see, but can grasp from the context

Note to Self

I am much better at warbling
old love ballads
when slowly riding a rickety bicycle
down bumpy country footpaths

Each tussock of grass, quaking out of me
the tantara of longing
Every old root, jarring the lovesick
ratatat from the drum of my diaphragm

Little knolls of the earth, throwing
the jilted notes from me
like paper planes onto the wind
The rubadub of the many grooves

The pitapat of each pothole on the way
Bouncing alarmingly around the rhythm

that's throbbing from the orchestra of crickets
in the shadowy lounge of evening

My wretched voice skipping
like a needle crackles on vinyl
Veering off-road into the field for the scat coda

My broken heart shaking to pieces
until I am nothing but an unwed
downhill wheel

Motorbike to Mỹ Sơn

When I left in the early morning
It felt like a pilgrimage

Nothing in my pockets
No watch on my wrist
No words fogging up my goggles
superimposed between me and the day

Just the clean wind on my face
The dawn coming in papaya colors
The engine thrumming
How futile poetry seemed

What was it then
the weight I felt that evening on the ride back
The cows grazing in the shade
of sparsely set trees

The stands of palms like palisades
beyond the vibrant paddy fields

The peaking straw cones of curious glances
from under each *nón lá*
rising here and then there

The sun-washed, pastel walls
of abandoned structures overgrowing with flora
the crumbling vestiges of French Indochina

Or was it the loneliness of the jungle ruins
the russet stone and hoary moss
earning no visitors this day

The bamboo staved shovel stuck in the soil
like something that was left to grow

The laundry strung up on lines
the wind filling the hollows of ghostly shirts

Or was it the heat lightning
coming down over the mountains
Flashing the colossal
cavernous depths of clouds

The rain that began sliding
the corrugated metal roofs of farm sheds
The floating vegetation on the swelling rivers
Or the crepuscular rays that came after all that
beaming down onto the glistening wetlands

Or was it my own silly weight
I had hauled all the way back
to lay upon the white altar of the page
To shove into the already full
mausoleum of poetry
To plead that it should live forever

Allusions

They are loosed like carrier pigeons
From the careful, page-worn hands
Of robed scholars leaning over stone ledges
That look out upon tidy quadrangles

Little scrolls nimbly rolled up
and delicately shackled to wiry, apricot legs

Esoteric messages bearing secrets
Linking one text to another
Or sometimes foreshadowing
the spinning thread of a character's fate

Words calling to mind
a certain Shakespearean king
who had a proclivity
for traipsing cornfields in the nude

A nod to the once looming ziggurat
that came toppling down in biblical times
leaving everyone at a loss for words

Gestures to the wax in the wings
of a boy who flew to the height of hubris

The sprouting pole of a nose
Poking forth with each mistruth

A reflection on the devil-may-care
impetuousness of a leaf-clad girl picking fruit

How many lost or intercepted
by the enemy of the uncultivated reader
no one could be sure

Often flying unseen
high above the brow of clouds
imperceivable in the white glow

Or at times, where I can see them now
in the library book that is open on my lap
Perching at the foot of the page in cooing rows
nestling onto those invisible lines

Right beside, I'm noticing now
the roguish graffiti
some previous vandal of a reader
penned into the margins

"*It's just like that day*
the horse ate my pants!"

The startling flutter of wings overhead
The warm stool running down my jacket
and onto the park bench
My alert gaze, studying the vacant sky

The Pagoda

I used to study Korean
by reading the names of lovers
who had paired themselves off
on the pagoda in the park

Couples carved into the wooden columns
like brief poems

What must be, I thought
the oldest poetical form
a solitary tercet in which the second line
must always be the ideograph for love

My fingers following the grooves
the bite of the knife tip
these scars of guarantee
As I murmured aloud each character

The slipshod scrapings
of the routine and halfhearted courters
with all the passion of a branch-end
against the house-siding
Now in the windy night of someone's past

The tragic and hurt sweethearts
who had returned here
to dash out a particular line
in some later revision of bleary-eyed clarity

The promiscuous and prolific suitors
their names falling in great frequency
again and again like the blade hews
against the overgrowth of an ensnaring jungle

The spontaneous and unprepared darlings
leaving crude, illegible markings
made with what must have been
I imagine, a dull stone of nearby convenience

The unrequited admirers
who took the liberty of scribing out
the entirety of the stanza
in the same devout handwriting

And my favorite, the resolved and greedy
furrowing deep into immortality
like the clawing on the backside of a coffin door
that had buried their love alive

And it was in the rainy season
under the dripping eaves I felt like Noah

Sounding out the roll call amidst my study
whispering the lovers forth two by two
filling the ark of memory that would keep them
floating one day more on the flood of time

Our creaking course charted to eternity

And against my better judgment
I would still hand out a penknife
into this argosy of lovestruck whittlers

The great watery purge of God
Leaking through hacked poems

That were two-thirds signatures,
Spouting through heart shaped holes

Your Beloved Protagonists

I know you've gotten rather attached
to these individuals throughout
the last couple hundred pages of this novel

Even their little oddities
have begun to resonate with you

The way she loops her hair
behind her ears when she's concentrating
The way he still absently hums that old tune

But the pages between
your thumb and the back cover
Are waning
and the scale is tipping
Toward the last word
and let's face it

Nobody lives forever
No matter how fictitious
Would you rather it happen
beyond the veil of the last page
in the unknown that awaits?

No, I really think it's best
for it to happen here
Within the realm
of your sympathetic omniscience

And this day seems as good as any

I know they are just
riding the carriage down the winding lane
between the sanguine poppy fields
the same way they did so many years ago
Before — everything

But stranger things have happened

You never know
What poisonous turns of fate
are slithering about in the periphery
What potential villains
are at this very moment
deliberating some nefarious soliloquy
in the shade of the hedgerows

I can see by your white knuckled
grip on the binding
and that swimming look in your eye
you're not yet ready to let go

All the more reason
we should pull over
into this lovely meadow of poetry

Unbridle the characters for a moment
remove the bit from their mouths
and pat down their sweaty withers

No need to run them into the ground
carting the story around
the many plot turns of the novel
Just give their hindquarters a slap
and send them galloping over the rolling field

And not the rolling field that comes
before the climatic conclusion
of the shadowy forest glade
And not the rolling field that came after
the antiheroics of the small farming village

Just the rolling field as it is today
Where there too will come an end
if not a conclusion

And what moves it all is hard to say
Protagonism passing from the whipping manes
To the passing clouds, their massive shadows
and the bending grass they swim through

Even the wind itself, rushing around

like an omniscient reader

II.

Edditors

Who need them
Now that your hear

I won't tell you how long I've waded
As one does bee side a telephone
a loan on a Saturday knight
for you to finally pickle me up

I won't bother men shunning how many ours
I spent inn front of the spellcheck
Pimping over every minor detail
Getting everything write for you to sea me

But I think its only fare for you to no
that I've really bin looking foreword
to finally meating you

And if I shooed boar you
I hope you wont be too nude
By ending our evening abruptly
By returning me back home
to the shelf immediately

I hope you won't be two insulated
by the looks on there feces
When you bring the likes of me
into the café under you're arm
When everyone else is shitting across
from a Dickinson, or a John Teats

Knot everyone can be as tit elating
company as Edgar Allan Poo

In the long nun, what they think
really isn't important
Poetry is, after all, no pubic affair
Butt its what you think that matters

I trust you won't fudge me two hard
when I Babylon about things over my head
Still except me, even though
I usually act like I know more then I due

Because, I want too be Frank,
I'm hoping to fine someone
to grow mold with
Someone who likes me four who iamb

Someone who likes to throw dinner panties
and who can Finnish my sentences
Who knows what I mean
even when I don't make cents
in spit of my malapropisms, and maybe just
for our parrots to think we're a really cute pear

What I really dream about
is someone who wood

just wipe the coffee ring from my jacket
without halving to skald me for it
Someone who isn't hippo critical

And maybe if I'm really lucky
Someone who'll just remove
the unnecessary a pause trophy
as genitally as one brushes the grass
from a dear one's hare

Someone who'll just best toe the comma
As quietly as one tucks a blanket on a dead one
who accidentally fell asleep in the living room
reading a book of bewildering poetry

Donating Blood

It's hard to focus
on writing poetics

With this vampiric contraption
sucking the blood
from my arm —

I suppose a metaphor
could be ventured
Wherein, this parasitical apparatus

Is my OCD.
A mosquito-like villain,
preying on my concentration

Or perhaps a simile,
seeing how at this moment
my pen and I are much alike

Both dripping our selves out.
Come to think of it,
I've never felt closer to my pen.

Still, some blank verse
would go nicely;
My heart pumping the blood

As my own hand now pumps the words onto
This page to the thumping, humdrum rhythm

But instead I've decided to simply supine here
To let my mind flow out into the world
Float down the mysterious river of life

Not unlike this blood
that has passed through my heart
This red that was once a part of my existence
will soon run another clear tube
crossing that invisible threshold
upon which it will become someone else

Carried to places I've never been
Quickening with the surge
of a nervous hand being softly held
for the first time,
Or slowing down for someone's last sleep

Or if I am lucky, spent as a paper cut
On the hurried page-turning
Of *Anna Karenina*
A book I still haven't finished

Or luckier still, scraped and squandered
On the sidewalk of childhood
Too excited to stop or cry or think
Whose it is now

The Forecast

From across the pond
with my glasses off
the white dogwood tree
looks like a frizzy storm cloud

That has descended
sometime earlier this morning
to drag its gaseous belly
and nest itself in a copse with flowers

I can't help but to think of Wordsworth
and his lonely existence
Wandering by suspended
from his daffodil friends

I bask in their reunification
Here among the park dwellers —

The newspapered men, the lovers, the geese.

Here they can dance and sway together
A safe distance from the troposphere

I almost want to walk over
and welcome it to the neighborhood

But I know as soon
as I am close enough to extend
my hand and hospitality, it will again be
the drooping branch of a dogwood tree

I heard once
that Monet's unique
impressionisms and unlikely strokes
were due in part to his bad eyesight

And now I wonder
how blind I would need to be
To bring all the clouds down
from the heavens

To end their loneliness, and ours —
Probably as blind as if
the earth were covered worldwide
with a rolling thicket of vicarious clouds

Love

Is an outrageous title for a poem
However feeling particularly ambitious
as I cruised above a landscape of clouds
at thirty-five thousand feet
that is what I wrote at the top of the page

I wanted it to be image-driven, as they say
an easily referenced visual

Like a troika of trotting Clydesdales
that could haul the weight
of this grand sentiment

The scenery of the stanzas smoothly reeling by
like a park of wooden benches, stone fountains
and orderly flower beds

But truth be told, there isn't a lot to look at
here in this airplane cabin
Aside from the pluming cigarette
above every row
authoritatively banned with a red cross
confirming that yet again
this is to be another non-smoking flight
information no one has needed since Sinatra

Other than that, all I can think about
is the rather unlikely sight
of a Cambodian elephant I saw yesterday
shakily holding a paint brush
in the crook of her trunk
extending it so effortfully for each little stroke

Which appeared to me then simliar
to watching a cardiopulmonary bypass
being performed on a flea

And when Soriya, the Seurat of the jungle
nervously ended the performance
by slowly rounding a shape like a clover petal
joining the symmetrical halves
of the same strange fruit

The universal symbol of the red heart
registered in the eyes of the audience
And a tumultuous ovation ensued
for the massively cultivated beast
that had been trained
to repeat this unnatural symbol

I would like to say that
I walked over to express how moved I was
by this act besot by irony, tragically poignant
and beautifully executed

I would like to say I lifted up the coarse
heavy flap of an ear

and whispered what it all meant
what they were feeling
and had been reminded of

The boundless hope, the mystic compassion
the fathomless belonging, the wild infinity
the transcendental kindness
the indescribable warmth, the unending wonder
The greatest of all feelings

Just before I unpinned
the colossal metal hula-hoop
of a collar from around her neck
and uprooted the huge stake
anchoring her to the ground

Just before we set out
mowing a path through the verdant jungle
toppling trees, scattering the orange and yellow
plumes of parrots into flight

Just before going to see what we could do about the plight of those Clydesdales

Dust to Dust

There's nothing for collecting dust
Quite like more dust.

Here on the hardwood floor
my notebook aside
a single wick candle
The dust bunnies roll in

Like tumbleweeds
from the dark abyss of the house
Into this spherical realm
of light, and observance

And as I pinch one up
mopping the powder of daily debris
that covers the smooth planks
I think—

There is nothing for collecting dust
Quite like more dust.

A modicum of resourcefulness
floating around in my airy brain
amidst millions of other
empirically learned modicums

All of which being so inconsequential
they'll more often than not
float by unnoticed
We take them quietly to the grave.

However, this one in particular
I'd like to impart
before I depart
this realm of light and observance

Which reminds me,
I discovered this morning

The bagel vendor on the street
whose bizarre hand gestures
we all had previously thought were due
to the hysteria that naturally comes
with participating in the bagel market

Are in fact hand signings
in a silent conversation
to a lady, I believe to be his wife
Who can often be found hanging laundry
from the third floor apartment, across the street

Catching these sweet nothings
from behind the fresh and damp
table linens, bed sheets and rags

And by the by,
Having fully knocked the etymology
behind 'teeter-totter' right out of the park
amidst the deep thoughts of childhood

Here in my twenty-fifth year of life
I find myself chasing down
the elusive origins of 'seesaw'

Being able to *see* the ocean beyond the wall
at the height of this contraption
And being able to tell you, reminiscently
I *saw* it, upon my jarring *thump*
back to the ground

And as I hesitate to burn my collected dust ball
like a funeral pyre upon my single wick candle
unable to fully commit to the heathenish act,
I think—

These all are the particles
that the loving world
will beat off the pillows
and shake off the sheets
of our beds when we die.

A billowing roll of blankets
that sends the dust swimming
in and out of streams of morning light

Preparing a freshly made bed
for the next child to sleep and dream anew

Somewhere Over the Atlantic

Perhaps the only one still awake on this plane
I am the horrid passenger
with the overhead light on

With jet black night outside the windows
There is nothing but the single cone
of blinding stage light
projecting down on my open book

And I'm beginning to feel
like I'm starring in a play
Apparently, about a guy who just reads

A production so unforgivably dull
So freakishly *avant-garde*
So lacking in a human pulse
So surprisingly Aristotelian in unity

That when the light of a new day
meets us here in the sky
and the cabin is suffused with light
The glare of sun running
the metal wing like a fuse

I expect to see rows of empty seats
The cockpit door swinging open
The yoke idling back and forth
The plummeting plane completely abandoned

Except for of course the first class passengers
who have paid too much to skip out now
determined to see the underlying meaning

Swearing that those other philistines
parachuting through the morning sky
falling in bouquets, back down to earth
Just didn't get it

A Fly On The Wall

"A good writer knows how to be the fly on his or her own wall."
— The Writer's Field Guide

That guy with the pencil behind his ear
Is talking to that girl again

And he's telling her that "this right here"
Meaning their lying together,
"Is the most important thing in all the world"

He tells her
That it's even more important
than charcoal herringbone tweed suits.

She considers a moment,
And agrees.

He tells her
That it's even more important
than all the paintings Caravaggio painted.

She considers a moment,
And agrees.

He tells her
That it's even more important
than vegetable kofta curry.

She considers a moment,
And agrees.

He tells her
That it's even more important
than bowler hats.

This prospect gives her pause,
Yet she agrees.

He tells her,
taking notice of the blanket,
That it's even more important
than goose down.

"What‽"
She said
With a palpable interrobang.
"More important than Goose Town?"

From that slight misunderstanding
they proceeded to imagine up
a Goose Town.

Where all the Geese constituents
wear really important bowler hats
which go smashingly
with their innate color scheme.

They waddle around in their gaggles
communicating back and forth
in a language consisting entirely
of the word “honk!”

Enunciated in endless intonations,
making for quite a boisterous community

The girl crosses the room
and opens the windows
to let the apartment breathe

The fly
That’s been waiting patiently
On the wall
Dashes out into the open spring day

Completely discombobulated
with legends of Goose Town.

The Invention of the Umbrella

I love the invention of the umbrella.
I cannot fathom any other way to begin
than by first stating
I love the invention of the umbrella.

How this person must have stood
Out in a drizzle
How this simple idea
must have sprung upward
from their imagination

Shooting to full extension with a pop
The ferrule poking the zenith
The mobile canopy conceived

Destined to be, years later
fashioned in school bus yellow

Its breadth growing so as to include
the company of loved ones, arm in arm

Fated to be dubbed the brolly and bumbershoot
But now only a nameless apparatus
Now only a shoot of dreams

A translucent schematic of dimensions
held in the hand of the inspired genius

Running home to the construction table
splashing across a meadow of puddles
smile streaked with rain

No waft of wind dragging in the hollow
No impeding torque on the wrist

I love the invention of the umbrella
Almost as much as I love the choice
that inevitably came of it all

On a subsequent day
when yet another genius
furled the contraption
that took the world by storm
and lowering it
with a quizzical expression
Stepped back out
into the country shower

The immediate ablution
of this new and unnatural discovery
and the fresh insanity perceived
by the onlookers thronging together
forming the very modern vertical phalanx

Holding back the current of the day

Gumshoe

There is an awkward moment that follows
coming across someone
who was attempting to take
a private selfie

Like stumbling upon a thief
who was casing the place

Unsnapping the black Gladstone bag
taking out the delicate instruments
The tripod, the extendable stick
Setting the timer
Putting on the ski mask of a feigned smile

Appraising the value
of Tutankhamen's shiny bust
Assessing the weight of Liberty's copper torch

Sizing up the Taj Mahal's minarets
Guesstimating the smooches
that festoon Oscar Wilde's tomb

Making sure no one was looking when they
pressed the stethoscope to the vault
of eternal history

The combination lock
turning ever so slightly
Waiting for that click, smiling
as they picture themselves
Not looting the cracked safe
but squeezing inside

Peeing in the Deep End
of a Crowded Pool in Early June

Is something I have never actually done
but since you're already here

I would call your attention
to the lowering level of the water
inching down each black dash
marked on the glossy white tile

From all the readers who are now
expediently exiting the pool of this poem
having rounded the corner of the last page
and plunged into these disconcerting waters

You might be struck, as Archimedes was
by the principle of displaced volume

The epiphany that sent him
streaking from the bathtub
parading his Eureka noodle
around the streets of Syracuse.

And that creepy epithet
Just lost us a few more

Swimmer after swimmer climbing out
dripping trails along the warm cement
back to their fluffy striped towels
and white plastic sunchairs

And across the way
Breaststrokers running aground
moored upon the shoals of such titles as
“Verses Logged from the Toilette”

Divers cracking their heads

On the dry bedrock of such headliners as
"Memoirs of a Titmouse" and
"A Dream of a Dream Dreamt
Within a Dream that was not my Dream"

Vacated puddles
much like the one in which we now sit

And if you ask me, we're better off
No fear of drowning in the obscurity
No diving for hidden meanings
No dubious interpretations bubbling up
from the reader next to you

None of those concerns to be found
Here in the ankle-deep dregs of the last stanza
Which I assure you, while lacking in all depth
is, at present, entirely sanitary

III.

On Constructing Holes

Let me ask you
Do the pervasive white margins of this page
constitute the negative space?
The inky, sinuous script
passing through this vacuous rectangle

Like after swimming underwater
to emerge up through the surface
The smell of chlorine returning
and those vermicular squiggles
float by like ghosts in your vision
A procession of long dead worms
frozen in rigor mortis
Crossing over to the glow of the afterlife

Because at times I think it's more like ice fishing

Each stroke and serif of the typeface
a hole chiseled through the frozen sheet
by sedulous anglers
And there are poems swimming down there
in the cold, dark current

Left to right, we drop the mind
Like a line through the depths of each letter
The little chasms of each consonant and vowel

Waiting to feel the tug of familiarity
For the line to go taut with resonance
The sudden pull of life
That pending bite of recognition
which we can expect any moment

If and only if, no more of our bait
goes floating off across the Great Divide
And so long as our line doesn't break
which, to be honest, is a premature ass—

The Great Onomatopoeia Inquisition

I sit here contesting the supposed verity
of certain onomatopoeia words

"Clang"
I enunciate.
"Clang"
I say it raptly.
"Clang"
I intone in quick succession.
"Clang, Clang"

I do not hear
Someone shuffling
Pots and pans from the cupboard

I do not hear
A box of tools

Emptying on the sidewalk

And I certainly do not hear
Knights in full plate armor
Gridlocking on the field of battle

Clang,
You are an imposter
and are hereby accused of such

I motion that the court
Slam the iron wrought jail cell
and throw away the keys

But gently on the first
and not at anything particularly
Hard or stony on the latter

Early Love Verses

or

Why Some Poets Die Alone

I believe fruit
Must've been inspired
By your lips
When fruit was taking form
Born of water

And judging by their behavior
I'd say the Granny Smith apples
Growing plump
On the boughs
Must be emulating
Your smiling cheeks.

Petrichor

It's a word I've always wanted
to use in a poem

Ever since I first came across it
as I fingered through the names
One literary giant to the next
and their alleged favorite word

Sylvia Plath's, I think it was
or maybe I'm making that up

Either way, it was then I vowed
as any conscionable poet would
To see that the flopping fish of a word
made it back into the cool
runnning water of poetry someday

The glittering plunk
into the clear glass fishbowl on my desk
The instant circumnavigation
of those bulbous eyes

And every time I look at it there
I'm given pause
That there should be such a word
That language should be so acute

It leaves me wondering
about all the other deft words there must be
for every little thing

A word for the tan line of a wristwatch
and one for the black dots on dice

Probably one for the metallic taste
of blood in your mouth

And one for the high pitched ringing
we sometimes hear
when nobody else does

One for the excessive reverence of Shakespeare
and one for the vocation of book burning

And one for the inevitable era of humankind
when there will be a word for everything

All the blanks spaces in the dictionary filled in
The tip of the tongue evolving to monstrous size
Everyone suffering lethologica

No more need for poems to go dancing
around the idea of a word
like savage children go splashing
around a soggy yard, their soaked shoes
like puddles strapped to their feet

No gray rainclouds dissipating in the sky
No lightness in the atmosphere
The grass unladen with droplets
concaving the light of day

The rust not growing on bikes
nor on swing chains

The windows not blearing
the vibrant green of a damp lawn
No rainbow prisms striking the sparkling air

No satisfied fish
looking up from the depths
of a swelling, mysterious sea

OCD

They've asked me to write about it

Though I'm under the impression
that the only real understanding
might be gotten from fallen angels

Being exiled from the kingdom of heaven
where I can only presume
shoes are kicked off in perfect parallels

Where, by the grace of God
the floor to the public urinal
isn't a tiled minefield of cracks

A place never plagued
by the odious dust bunnies that multiply daily
legions ever scampering from some foul warren

Yes, I would have been glad
of their wretched company last night
and the scapegrace soiree that might've been

As I stood opening and shutting
the refrigerator door past midnight
waiting for just the right click

They could have regaled me with accounts
of the golden light that washes
through the glowing clouds of perpetual dawn

Light so pure it can cleanse the mind
of every hell-bent obsession
they'd say with wistful, far-off gazes

And then I could tell them all about
work and how we must tear away for sleep
no longer having forever

To make a heaven of the hell
that is screwing a milk carton cap on correctly
or color coding the pens in the drawer

Wide-eyed and unhinged
they'd listen to their first sleepless night
of postlapsarian sounds

The grass growing unevenly
the picture frames tilting askew
the bending spine of a book

Some forsaken copy of *Dante's Inferno*
dog-eared and face down on the bedside
the words muffled against the wooden surface

Failing to mention whatsoever
the canto about the uncondemned neurotics
who are free to leave at any time

Provided they can just let go
of the bagel crumbs
between the spaces of the keyboard

Provided they can just stop adjusting
the circumference of the brimstone
assuring the circles are indeed

Hgvsahgvsdfhafdhvasdfhgsfdvh Perfect.

Why Did She Have to Skin Her Knee?

The wild geometry of her lips
A blooming, terrible and perfect
The pain of their parting
still wet and swollen with youth
and wanting of a sigh

Her blood now runs my hand warm
As if a handful of rubies melted
As if a galaxy of grapes ruptured in my grasp

This blood that has squeezed through her heart
That has filled her toes
That knows no other way to meet the world
than by that invincible color
that drips and puddles like a tired lover

And suddenly I forgive

All things gushing, all things exploding

All things that must burst

Into death

All things that break with life

— I even forgive babies

Youth

How sunburned our asses were then
That morning after we had left the beach
We began to understand
against the coarse linen chair cushions

I don't think that was a nude beach
You said offhand
and I would rather Venice stop sinking
You added a spoonful of gelato later

The sailboats coming to port
Red, blue and varnished and listing heavily
The masts like old metronomes
to the somber waltz of the waves

Floating ice cubes chiming as the briny breeze
coursed over the perspiring glasses of water

Where the warm sweat had been on your arm
Now there were only goosebumps
Those little blonde hairs bristling
aglow against the redness of your skin

Those rising blush tones of the stone
The colors of the city ripening
against the onset of blue, bruising shadows
Burying the sun
that had seasoned your face with freckles

The tresses of your hair
Forking across your eyes like lightning

As the restless maritime flag
unfurled to a sharp *thwick*
The metal rings of the flagstaff lanyard
rattling like a dinner bell

And the sailors hurriedly tethering
their tattered ropes to the cleats

How the old ferry captain paused akimbo
to watch us walk down
the length of the creaking wooden dock
before raising swarthy hands

How he exasperatingly danced his fingers down
from overhead to his knees
After gesturing to the reaching clouds above
How he did not speak a word of English

How the hopelessness of charades
finally smiled on him
as he futilely worried for our safety
How it was beyond him to explain
and us to understand, as the first raindrop fell
That there was just no leaving that day

Thunderstorm Approaches Venice

The salty darkness riven open by lightning
The recoil of your pupil and the silence

Your voice as you spoke to me
Under the dripping eaves of the stone architrave

Drowned out by the splattering of rain
The discord of the warm, wailing wind

And when you finally grew frustrated enough
I saw you shout through the chaos

Just as the thunder
Rumbled down on the piazza

Filling your mouth and the hollows of the night
Like the wide roar of a lion

Your words reverberating, a language
I was re-learning by imitation

The unmistakable soft bite on the 'v'
Followed by the gradual kiss of 'you'

Crossing the last distance we ever shared
Reassuring myself there was just no way

That on this particular evening
Of all evenings

You had been trying to rename the old city
The '*Isle of View*'

Over the Dark Meadow

The forking down of lightning
Like violent, greedy, silver roots

Catching the flash of its own reflection
In the sudden appearance

Of the silhouetted, leafless tree
Branching alone against the sky

The scurrying retreat of the light
The storm turning to growl, fur bristling

Sleeping in the Pews – Christmas Eve, 2009

There was something I had meant to say

But how the house felt like a palace then
vast in its darkness, vast as snowfall
feels when you're falling asleep

She danced down the hall in socks
the charm of the tired damask wallpaper
gladdened by swaying candlelight

I know now she was shooting
a scene about the madness of love

She danced like a ballerina dances
lithe as the grass in the wind
Pliant as a swoon

Or a phantasm of joy
movements spry and fragmented
cocking the trigger of the next
The stutter stepping, the mastery of falling down
the spinning – balanced as a planet
Feral as a nun
Brutal as maternity

And when she tumbled down to me
we began to crawl the long darkness
like children, or soldiers in danger
combing the floor for the ring
that had slipped from her finger

There was something I had meant to say then

There were words in me
held like a sparkler
in the summer night of myself
Searing cursive in the silent backyard

She **kissed** me then.
Her cheeks were red and her nose cold.

My train of thought
that had been shoveling my attention
like coals into the furnace
forged on ahead without me
Hurdled into the snow drifts
The boxcars rattling by
into the deafening silence of the blizzard
The snow falling down onto the tracks
in the wake of the caboose
The whiteout of the tundra
zipping itself back up to blankness

I blinkingly awoke to the eye contact of another
in a room full of heads bowed in prayer
frost dripping from my hair
In that place where all poems hope to die

IV.

The Report of the Pistol

"The report of the pistol
brought a crowd into the room." — Mary Shelley

What followed was a fusillade of wing beats
and a murder
of inky crows that sallied forth
Against the once silent
steel sky of a winter morning

And some comment should be made
on the endless stands of sweet birches
that speedily rumored the news
through their stricken numbers
into the distance

Shuddering a dusting of snow here
and then there

I should mention
that four deer heads
in the winding coombe beyond the lane
Startled to attention —
Just before resuming the twitching of ears
The flicking of tails
The nictitating of gentle, coffee eyes

And I would be remissed if I did not record
the verbigeration of the mountains
Like colossal newborns
Mindlessly repeating
the only sound that has ever torn
through the clean landscape of infancy

And as for the rest
there is very little I can detail on the matter
Except that I now sit
awaiting the crowd —

Trying not to look too expectant
when they come pouring forth into my room
Into the new and wild quiet
of this white page

I will eagerly take their hats and coats
Glad for their safety
And tell them a poem
I know by heart
of two lovers that could not be together

They would meet once a year, I will say
Somewhere on the plains of Africa
Ten paces away and never closer
Raise an upward pistol each
And part the sky —

Just before sharing a glass of the finest brandy
without so much as a word

A riveting oration

That will commence, I imagine

Shortly after I fire the finality of this period

into yet another blank space.

Landscape Painters Across the Pond

I've been sitting here for nearly an hour
on a weatherworn, black bench
and not so much as a single brush stroke
Has been tossed my way—

After utterly exhausting
my *poet looks pensive* pose
I resorted to an elegant *contrapposto* lean
One hand needlessly resting
atop the iron backrest
Attempting to provoke
any effeminate Renaissance inclinations
one of them may harbor
— To no avail.

It may interest you to know I then stood
under the arching boughs of the willow tree

Seeing if either of them may be persuaded
by a tasteful *repoussoir* — still nothing.

I tell you shamelessly now I was degraded
to perching over the pond's precipice,
staring longingly at my own reflection.

Knowing full well opportunities
for classical mythology
don't just stroll along through the park
as often as they once did.

Still, not so much as a glance
up from their canvases

Realizing I've thus lowered myself
to competing with the local ducks and lily pads
for a bit of strange-painter attention
And say what you will,
these aren't easy acts to follow.

Which one especially robust mallard
makes clear to me as he coolly
spreads the glassy surface
with his proud, glossy breast
Rippling up what's left of the dusk light
Confident that he's effectively
secured his place in yet another
Park landscape —

Realizing this I think,
This is no way to live, and concede.

Yet, even still
The three of them sit judiciously
like the three fates
stooled over their spinning wheel
Working purposefully,
spooling out the history of my favorite park
— Without me in it

And they'll keep sitting there, too
Presiding over the happenings of the pond
until the last of the summer light
is drawn back over the horizon.

Light that the sun has cast
over the world at dawn
Like a fisherman hurls
his gossamer net over the stream.

A net that is now being trawled quickly
into the twilight
Where the day will dump out
what it has ensnared
onto white cotton beds
Where all the images will flop down wiggling

Where they will meet the hungry
forking and knifing of dreams

Just as soon as that forgettable American waiter
with the pencil behind his ear
brings the covered dish of *foie gras* to the table

Just before he hurries back to the kitchen
to herd a flock of waddling tail feathers
out the backdoor, into the night of nonexistence

Just before the silver lid is lifted to reveal
nothing but dissipating steam

The Committed

This is where they come
Ushered in by orderlies in white coats
as if walking down the aisle to be married off
To the dull suitor of retention
To the domesticity of mnemonic devices
No ring, but a string to be tied around the finger

This is where we bring them
To be sanitized and locked up
Hygienically sealed off
from the disorganized world
Filed, archived and straitjacketed

Past the tidy landscaping
Within the muted brick walls creeping with ivy
Usually named after a charitable saint
but contrary to tradition, this place
is simply called *Memory*

Rooms upon sterile rooms
full of the perplexed and deranged
A Shakespearean Sonnet
once memorized in high school
standing on the coffee table
Reciting to the room, blocking the T.V.

The Capitals of the European Countries
playing chess by the window
Fur Elise pounding the same droning chords
on the untuned piano

The definition to 'Pugnacious'
refusing medication again
Spraying the paper cup of pills
across the linoleum floor

An Emily Dickinson poem
rocking back and forth
On the floorboards above — alone in her room

The Lord's Prayer catatonic in the corner
still not talking to anyone
The Pledge of Allegiance
receiving shock therapy in the forbidden wing
A dependable Joke lifting the sofa cushions
looking everywhere for his imaginary friend
the Punch Line

The Opening line to Moby Dick
introducing itself to the doctor
for the thirtieth time this morning

And there are the daily discharges, as well
Your First Home Address has been transferred
to a new facility

The Wedding Vowels have been signed over
to the custody of a loved one
A dissolved Anniversary Date
has been released, but is refusing to leave

All is tidy and organized, here in the ward

All except for the Name of the Woman
Who introduced herself to me
Not five minutes ago
Just before absconding out the open window

I am outside chasing her around the grounds
The wind billowing up her white gown
that hadn't been fully tied yet
Desperately trying to convince her
that everything is much nicer back inside

Our shadows casting long on the greensward
The summer sun setting toward oblivion

Concerning the Garrulous Philosopher
Who Thought it Wildly Profound That the Greeks
Had at Least Four Concepts for Love

I didn't have the heart to tell him
That there were actually a great deal more

For example, there is the love
of procuring the window seat on the bus
And love of the condensation on the pane
when caught in the honey glow of morning light

Two loves that the Greeks
might have reserved nomenclature for

And there is the incomparable love
of the sound of lead pencils scribbling on paper
in an otherwise silent classroom
Those seismometers of the unseen mind
measuring the magnitude of thought

The smell of recently ground coffee beans
And the unmatched love
of putting on a warm sock
that has just tumbled out of a dryer
in the early hours of a winter morning

And it should be no long debate of semantics
to conclude that my peculiar love of pretending
that the chore of cleaning out the cat litter box
is actually a fragile archeological excavation
Is a love surely unlike any other love

Love of squeezing slimy pumpkin seeds
till they rocket from the pinch
And love of watching the shadows of clouds
slide over verdant hillsides

The inimitable love of watching a lover
wrestle a turtleneck sweater off
their suddenly biggish head

And love of when fumbled toast
lands butter-side up

The solitary love for the mendicant's smile
sitting in the park, opposite the water fountain
Watching over his upturned hat
the sun-blazoned coins
splashing away for wishes

The paramount love of the neighbor lady
who reads novels as she walks her dog
as if consulting a map

Love of the sunlight
strobing through the branches
on a winding lane drive
And love of the crepuscular god-fingers
projecting down on the fields
bowing in the wind

Two separate loves that shouldn't be conflated
No more than one should go around saying
ascots and cravats are basically the same thing
— Love of bygone clothing accessories

And the unrivaled love
of binary star systems that dance the long waltz
toward one another for millions of years
Fixated on a singular purpose, until the song
finally brings them cheek to cheek
The moment exploding through time and space

Thus creating the distinct elements
that make possible bus windows
and the condensation on them

Cat litter boxes and socks
Pencils, papers, books
Pumpkin seeds, turtlenecks and toast

And even slightly inebriated philosophers
Mildly amorous for an entire four categories
of Grecian love

The Sneakers

All I have left of you are the sneakers
That bore your restless longing

The tread-bare bottoms smooth
as the day you were gone
Frictionless as you were amongst people
Peaceful as I knew you too well to imagine

There is the picture too
but the sneakers I like better
The picture is like prose
it is resolved and says too much
and in so doing, it tells lies
As we had a propensity for doing

The picture says we were ingenuous
The indifference to the camera on my face

The indifference of your unsparing smile
The picture says too much

Like I did when they finally got word to me
How I tossed embellishments upon your life
like roses upon your virgin casket
I would never get to see

How I folded the seasoned flag of your legends
into congruent angles of lesser glory
And of agreeable points.

But the sneakers are like a poem
They keep secrets
As we had a propensity for doing

They don't say how you never
really gave them to me
The don't tell of the night you moved out
Nor how we almost fought

They don't say how you bequeathed them to me
only in your carelessness
And I am grateful to them for that

For just slipping quietly on the next morning
to feet of like proportions and longing

The shoes and I keep secrets
Your unruly manner of wearing them
left the tongues sticking outward
incorrigible now in their protrusion

Obstinate like the sort of uncivilized child
we would like to have been just once

And now in a black suit and a forgettable tie
and these preposterous shoes
We are quietly obstinate on the teeming streets

Obstinate in the silent church pew
and obstinate on the silent
carpeted jet floor in the sky

Obstinate on the backseat of the bus
Barreling down roads
to places that will never know you

Obstinately fording the running stream
torrential, and irrevocable after the rain

And now we are obstinate in the dark country
So dark I cannot see my stumbling feet
But feel the chill of the hole in the sole
That in life, you wore clean through

Writing a Nonet

Is a lot like writing a postcard
Greetings sprawling as the landscape
on the front, but soon the words
start crowding, being shoved
to that closing cliff
wanting at least
to shout back
Wish you
Were

Analogy

It's not like the nodding of the boats
in the harbor to stillness
after the passing of a wake.
No, it's not like that at all.

And if one were to inquire into the matter
It isn't exactly like the trust
placed by the subconscious foot
in the last stair that doesn't happen to be there.
If only that were the case.

It bears a slight resemblance
To hastily scribbling a note to yourself
when the lights were out
and then trying to discern what secrets
the illegible scribbles hold come morning.
If only a slight resemblance.

And at one time or another
I'm quite sure I've conflated it
with that absurd moment
of noticing a red on yourself
that slowly registers as blood
Your own blood, at that
and the subsequent impulse
to remember the pain.

But really it's not like that at all
Even if I sort of want it to be.

And there was a time
When I thought it was like *love*
and so I called it all my life
All that I came looking for
The time of which I fought
for the meaning of this word
but have at last, on this day
relinquished it as a misnomer.

You know what it's like?
Maybe it's like discovering
that what your soul has always been bound for
Maybe isn't the connectedness of all things
and knowing how much you wanted it to be.

And maybe it's something like
what Satan must've felt
when he was flicked like a lit match
out through heaven's gate
into the propane tank of the abyss

Maybe it's something like that
But not really.

The Ghost of Solipsism

I am seventeen years old again
And I have written everything here

I wrote the pathetic fallacy of the blizzard
its quiet, teeming madness
and the rolling hills it falls upon
I wrote the personified sleeping snow
and the stands of naked trees
the snow is cradled by

The grove in the foreground
and the stream of consciousness
fraught with ice
Waiting to run again in spring

The literary construct of the house
Sitting on the hillside, looking out over it all

I framed its narratives, plotted its structures
Even the scaffolding of its stories

And inside I've written the antagonist
of the little sister
Who can be heard playing *Auld Lang Syne*
on the synecdoche of the eighty-eight ivories
Wearing my old, hand-me-down T-shirt
like an evening dress

I wrote the porcelain nativity scene
on the end table
The irony of the gold filigree
and the hair-thin crack in Joseph's head
I added for symbolism

Eleven steps up the staircase
just as I had written them
As well as the plot hole of the phantom twelfth
my foot always suspends belief for

I have written cold brass door knobs
And a plank of hallway light
to fall athwart the bed in the darkness
Where I've even written me, too.

Not the young man you see pretending to sleep
under the lump of blankets
But the other me, who is now ten years older
Who is revising this adolescent poem

Who has been brought back by the memory
Of restless pacing in the kitchen
The creaking of floorboards
The opening and shutting of every cupboard
The sidling of shadows in the periphery

Searching the hallways
without so much as an upward glance
Because all is just as I wrote it
All but you —

Through the window, in the yard
catching the snow on your tongue
Illuminated by the silver glow
of the winter moon
I don't know who you are

But you scare me and my stomach drops
Because when your mouth opens again
Surely you will herald the coming of the end

Or words will follow
that will leave me believing I really am
Not alone

That is, as soon as you
choke down that last flake
Which if you happened to notice
was singularly unique
And unlike any that I ever wrote before

The Non-Perennial Human

"In the middle of winter I discovered that there was in me an invincible summer." — Albert Camus

Why is it always that we are birthed forth
into the youth of Spring
only to wander into the sweet
Golden days of Summer, vintage
like Autumn's foliage
as Winter's coffin creaking winds
squeeze through the naked branches
On their way to blow out the last ember
of our single logged fire?

Why is it always
Her cherry lips bloomed in the youth
of her callow Springtime
as did her ingenuousness.

He eventually grew into
that stentorian voice
somewhere within the glorious
days of his Summer.

Her grinning blue eyes contained
the last soupcon of childhood
amidst the brisk Autumn
of her years.

His aristocratic cheekbones exposed
what was left of the remaining blue blood
still pumping through his old body
here in the Winter of his mortality

But to play along,
I find that in the dog days of my summer
well past the solstice of my adolescence
approaching the autumnal equinox of maturity

I'm finding it harder
to differentiate between the seasons

Even as the second hand of the clock
spins like an airplane propeller
I feel contented to sit and watch
the leaves fly from the boughs
Much like the leaves of our calendars
are being torn from their bindings
by the indifferent gusts of Time

Which takes them skipping across lawns
where they all heap in Old Man Death's yard

Where even he is reminiscing
about the verdancy of youth
When he held not a scythe, but a spade
When we were all running around barefoot
not yet seasoned enough in life to see
what was pushing up the daises

Death of the Author

"…The birth of the reader must be at the cost
of the death of the author." — *La mort de l'auteur*

Yes, I'm afraid it's true
It would seem, I'm giving up my ghost

The prognosis was delivered by no other
than the good doctor, Roland Barthes

Between you and I
It was a bit cold and impersonal
but somewhere amidst the perfunctory pages
I think I was able to decipher the point

— I have to die.

Apparently it takes
an accomplished Sorbonne scholar
to inform a person
that they won't be living forever

I know it's all brilliantly metaphorical
but that doesn't make it any less scary
from where I'm standing now

It seems like only yesterday
we were strolling the dewy grass of the preface
So many unturned pages before us
I wasn't being careful with my time
There's so much yet I wanted to say
So much I wanted to ask you

Like in that one poem
Did you get how throwing bucketfuls
of seawater overboard in order to stay afloat
was actually an analogy for editing?

And in that villanelle, the point wasn't
That I never did figure out the word
she kept tracing on my arm with her fingertip
that morning in church

Nor was it supposed to be a commentary
on the muteness of Religion
I was just trying to say
that I never forgot her touch

And I wasn't trying to get you to agree
that if Walt Whitman had a smell
it would *only* be of a smoldering Roman candle
I don't really know why I said that

And when I brought up
the price of tea in China
it wasn't a non sequitur
I just really couldn't believe how much it cost

The cracked tea pot catching rain in the garden
was admittedly a symbolic critique
on the current state
of postmodernist literary critiques
Was that not clear?

When I mentioned how the bicycle brakes
sounded like the yelping of a dog
it wasn't meant to be foreshadowing
For the record, the dog is perfectly fine

And to be honest, I didn't intend
for the carpenter's campfire
to be dramatic irony in that one verse
Though, I see what you mean now

And while there's still time
I want to make a quick palinode
and confess that I have, on occasion
taken a leak in the pool

But I refute the claim entirely
it was in any regard
a satirical commentary
on the principles of communism

Don't read too much into it
It was just a sign of the times
You don't know, you weren't there
We used to do that sort of thing

And when the newspaper kite
got snagged in the power lines
of that one haiku
It wasn't really about the dangers
of disentangling the truth from the media

And besides that
there was just one last thing
I wanted to ask of you
Though you don't owe it to me

That if we might take a temporary hiatus
from this depressing place
Away from the boring white walls

If we could just sneak past
The spectacled doctors of intelligentsia
The devout nurses of academia
The anesthesiologists of the lecture halls

Push the old car in neutral down the drive
Waiting till we're past the gate to rev the engine
then takeoff once more into the unknown night
— This time, you can drive

Our two headlights cutting a trail
through the heavy darkness
Like these lines through the page
On our way to the coast

Where the tide is tucking in the shore
for dreaming with each lapping wave
and above, the tintinnabulation
The toll of every star in the sky
So many of them long dead

Their light now running wild
through the vacuum of space
At the boundary of everything
Trying to outrun the universe
but are reaching the end of a taut leash
What I could only ever call loneliness

Beyond which
is where I had meant
to take you someday, I'll say
the morphine talking

And I will forgive you
If you should take a wrong turn
or if you're compelled
by the mysterious road
of a new destination
and change plans entirely

Just roll down the windows for me
The rushing wind, chill before dawn
smelling of the sea unseen
blowing pages loose from the stack

And forgive me, in turn
For being of no use when we come
to the many forks in the road
For turning the radio knob too many times
looking for a forgotten tune

For the screeching locusts
For the endless lines of reeling pines
Their pointed tops sawing at the pale sky
For being all alone
Come break of day

Glossary

For just a few of the most intolerable and unlikely words
that no one should be expected to define offhand, that I hope
no one ever expects me to define offhand, that inevitably
fall into the category of *trivial*, and
without which they wouldn't let me call myself a poet.

Good Reader — *Pg.* xv

euphonious Pleasing to the ear.

Thief of Paris —*Pg. 6*

zoetrope An old optical illusion, consisting of a spinning bowl with slits around its circumference that, when spun, showed the images on the inside in an animated sequence.

melliferous Honeyed, yielding honey.

Yoga — *Pg. 10*

bravura A display of great skill, or daring.

galley A ship with a slender hull, propelled by rowing. Think *Ben-Hur*.

A Hamster Wheel — *Pg. 14*

cogitation A contemplation.

corybantic Frenzied; agitated; unrestrained.

dénouement The final resolution in a plot. Literally, an 'untying.'

Portmanteau — *Pg. 19*

portmanteau An old suitcase or trunk. Also, a term for hybrid words, like *doohickey*... I think.

eucatastrophe Something like a happy ending, according to Tolkien.

Motorbike to Mỹ Sơn	*— Pg. 26*
palisade	A defensive wall of stakes.
nón lá	A Vietnamese conical hat.
Allusions	*— Pg. 29*
traipsing	To wander like King Lear.
ziggurat	A pyramidal tower, like Babel.
hubris	Excessive self-confidence, like that of Icarus.
impetuousness	To be rash, or impulsive, like dear Eve in Eden.
The Pagoda	*— Pg. 32*
argosy	A large ship with rich cargo.
Your Beloved Protagonist	*— Pg. 36*
withers	Highest part of a horse's back.
Edditors	*— Pg. 42*
malapropisms	Misused words; what I am checking my book for now.
Love	*— Pg. 52*
troika	A Russian carriage drawn by three horses abreast.
Somewhere Over the Atlantic	*— Pg. 62*
philistine	A person who is hostile to the arts.
A Fly on the Wall	*— Pg. 64*
interrobang	This thing **- ?** the combination of *?* and *!*
Invention of the Umbrella	*— Pg. 68*
ferrule	The cap at the tip of an umbrella.
phalanx	Joining shields for defense.

ablution A spiritual cleansing with water.

Peeing in the Pool... *— Pg. 73*

Eureka What Archimedes exclaimed when he discovered that the level of the bathwater lowered in direct proportion to the volume removed.

eureka noodle A nasty reference that you probably shouldn't go around saying.

Constructing Holes *— Pg. 77*

vermicular Worm-like.

serif A dash that finishes a letter stroke.

anglers People who fish.

Petrichor *— Pg. 82*

petrichor The smell after rain, esp. after a long dry spell.

lethologica The inability to recall a word.

OCD *— Pg. 86*

scapegrace A rogue or rascal; a fallen person.

postlapsarian The time occurring after the Biblical Fall.

brimstone The sulfurous stuff that often comprises hell.

Youth *— Pg. 92*

metronome A mechanism that clicks as it tilts back and forth, marking a consistent rhythm for musical purposes.

swarthy A dark, olive-toned, seasoned complexion; that this author, for one, finds quite fetching.

Thunderstorm... Venice — Pg. 95

architrave The 'main beam' of an entablature.

piazza A public square in Italy.

Sleeping in the Pews... — *Pg. 98*

damask A patterned fabric, or something resembling that fabric; often intricate flora.

phantasm A ghost; or creation of fancy.

The Record of the Pistol — *Pg. 102*

fusillade Simultaneous, or successive discharges.

coombe A narrow valley.

nictitating Winking.

verbigeration The constant, and mindless repition of a sound.

...Painters Across the Pond — *Pg. 106*

contrapposto *The r*epresentation of a human as a leaning figure; balancing to one side.

repoussoir A method of framing the composition of a painting.

trawl To fish by dragging a strong net through the water.

foie gras A duck or goose delicacy, often prepared by savage and cruel means.

Concerning the Garrulous... — *Pg. 115*

nomenclature A system of naming, or attributing terms.

Writing a Nonet — *Pg. 124*

nonet A poetical form that dwindles, line by line, from nine syllables to only one.

The Ghost of Solipsism — *Pg. 128*

solipsism The theory that only the self exists.

Death of the Author — *Pg. 135*

non-sequitur A statement having no relevance to that which preceded it.

palinode A poem in which the poet retracts something that was said earlier.

tintinnabulation The ringing sound of bells.

And

mumpsimus A fantastic word which, to my great regret, cannot be found anywhere else in this book, but of which I may, at times, be guilty of being.

Look it up
on **dictionary.com**,
the same place where I
procured the greater part
of these definitons.

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The author currently resides on Jeju Island in the Korea Strait where he spends his days teaching the best students in the world, eating cheese pizza, playing rudimentary piano, and writing something that vaguely resembles poetry.